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ABSTRACT

This working paper is intended for inclusion in a curriculum manual for future publication, possibly in 1972. A guide for preschool teachers, it offers goals and methods designed to increase thinking power in children and given them the opportunity to express themselves in their own way. The basic elements of the Cognitive Preschool Curriculum are described: I. Arranging the Room, II. Establishing a Daily Routine, III. Active Learning, IV. Using Language as a Tool for Thinking, V. Sequencing Activities from Concrete to Abstract According to the Levels of Representation, VI. Temporal Relations, VII. Spatial Relations, VIII. Classification, IX. Seriation, X. Number Concepts, XI. Using Themes or Units, XII. Planning and Evaluating Every Day, XIII. Making Home Visits, XIV. Working with Volunteers. (For related documents, see PS 006 090-094.) (RG)

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The High/Scope Cognitive Preschool Curriculum: An Open Framework

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation
Preschool Department

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THIS IS A WORKING COPY. It is being revised for inclusion in a curriculum manual we hope to publish in 1972.

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THE HIGH/SCOPE COGNITIVE PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM: AN OPEN FRAMEWORK

The High/Scope Cognitive Curriculum is an "open framework" for preschool teachers. As a framework it offers some suggested goals and methods designed to help children become better "thinkers" and it proposes some ways for a teaching staff to work together and to involve parents and volunteers. The openness of the framework means that there is ample flexibility to select learning goals for individual children and to tailor activities to the resources and cultural heritage of the community. The "openness" of the framework also implies an opportunity for children to make and carry out their own plans, to choose activities which interest them, and to express themselves in their own ways.

The basic elements of the program are described on the following pages.

WHAT A TEACHER USING THE COGNITIVE PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM DOES

I. Arranging the room

1. Dividing the room into several areas or interest centers. For example: Block Area, Art Area, Housekeeping Area, Quiet Area.

2. Storing equipment in the area where it will be used. Similar items are stored together to help children learn to classify. Labeling shelves and drawers with pictures of the contents.

3. Familiarizing the children with the names and contents of the areas.

4. Using a Planning Board representing the areas of the room.

5. Placing bulletin boards, planning boards, storage cabinets, etc., at the child's eye level.

II. Establishing a Daily Routine

1. Having a routine which is consistent from day to day.

2. During planning time, discussing the daily routine and helping children to make individual plans about where they will work and what they will do.

3. During work time, assisting children who are working in the various areas, helping them to carry out their plans and make new ones when they have finished. Conversing with children rather than "directing" them or "lecturing" them. Helping children to form the concepts outlined in the curriculum, but not imposing them unnaturally.

4. During cleanup, letting the children do most of the work, and helping them learn where things belong and why certain objects are stored together.

5. Reviewing with the children what they have done during work time at each area. Talking about how plans have been carried out and discussing what might be done the next day.

6. During group time dividing the children into groups so that each adult in the classroom leads a small number of children in a preplanned activity focused on some aspect of the curriculum. Working with the children at tables, seated with them, and getting them as actively involved as possible.

7. At transitions between one period of the day and another, letting the children know what part of the routine is next and sometimes giving the children special and enjoyable ways to move from one area to another.

8. At activity time involving the class in vigorous outdoor or indoor play, using this as an opportunity to implement goals of the curriculum.

9. At circle time reviewing the events of the day with the class and ending the day with a story, game, or musical activity.

III. Active Learning

1. Encouraging the active manipulation and exploration of the things in the classroom.

2. Showing the children how to use all of the senses in investigating something new.

3. Planning activities which involve children in physical movement.

4. Helping children to experience new concepts with their bodies, not merely in words.

5. Letting children discover relations and principles for themselves, not always telling them in advance what to expect.

IV. Using Language as a Tool for Thinking

1. Conversing in a plesant way with children.

2. Using divergent questions (questions with many "right" answers).

3. Encouraging children to express their ideas in words. Encouraging children to speak among themselces as well as with the teacher and other adults in the room.

4. Being a model for children in the use of language. Responding to and expanding their remarks, but not "correcting" their grammer, dialect, or pronunciation.

5. Helping children learn new words for things and relations. Describing for the child what he is doing if he himself cannot yet put this into words.

V. Sequencing Activities from Concrete to Abstract According to the Levels of Representation

1. Beginning a learning sequence or a theme with a concrete experience (the object level) - not a representational one. Having many real things in the classroom, not just models, toys, and pictures.

2. Encouraging children to use and investigate real things in many ways.

3. Helping children learn to identify objects using "index level" cues: sound, feel, smell, taste, imprints, etc.

4. Helping children identify objects which are partially hidden or have parts missing.

5. Representing experiences with children through imitation and sociodramatic play. Helping them use and find "props" for make-believe.

6. Helping children distinguish between real objects and representations.

7. Helping children to represent objects, events and relationships through pictures, construction of models, and use of toy models.

8. Helping the child to become familiar with the purpose of written language, rather than (at the preschool level) drilling on the mechanics of reading and writing.

VI. Temporal Relations

1. Helping children to learn to remember the past, anticipate the future, and describe the order of events in time.

2. Helping children to experience and label the beginning and ending of time intervals: using signals, timers, start and stop games.

3. Helping children to complete what they have begun.

4. Organizing activities which enable children to experience the movement of themselves and objects at various rates of speed and over different distances.

5. Postponing the use of clocks and calendars until the children understand the more basic concepts of time which do not invovle measurement and representation.

VII. Spatial Relations

1. Helping children to find out how things fit together, how they look when turned, folded, twisted, tied, stacked, stretched, etc.

2. Helping children to look at things from different spatial viewpoints.

3. Helping children to describe in words the position, direction of movement, and distance of things and people.

4. Helping children learn about how their bodies are put together. Getting them to move in different ways and to find out what can be done with the various body parts.

5. Calling the attention of the children to where things are located in the classroom, school, and neighborhood.

6. Helping the children to interpret and make symbolic representations (such as pictures and models) of the way things are arranged in space.

VIII. Classification

1. Encouraging children to investigate the uses and attributes of things: what you can do with them, where they are found, how they appear to different senses.

2. Helping children to notice and describe similarities and differences among objects.

3. Helping children to sort similar objects into groups, both in predetermined ways as when they put away classroom materials at cleanup time, and in ways that they suggest.

4. Describing an object or sorting a set of objects in several different ways, and helping children learn to do this.

IX. Seriation

1. Providing materials which can be arranged in order along some dimension such as size, texture, loudness, firmness.

2. Helping children to compare two things along some dimension and to arrange several things in order.

3. Matching one ordered set of objects with another.

X. Number Concepts

1. Giving children sets of distinct objects like buttons or beads to arrange and rearrange.

2. Making available for free exploration materials like water, sand, clay. Helping children to pour and transform these materials.

3. Showing children how to compare the number of items in two sets by matching them up in one-to-one correspondence.

4. Helping children to compare quantities of "continuous" materials like water or clay.

5. Helping children match a spoken number to an object as they count, counting each object once and only once.

6. Postponing the use of written numerals until later grades when the children will have attained conservation of number.

XI. Using Themes or Units

1. Planning themes or units which are consistent with the curriculum and implement curriculum goals.

2. Using the three following general themes throughout the year:

   a. the child himself: his unique characteristics (name, appearance, belongings, cubby or locker, symbol, family. The things he has done and made, learned and achieved.)

   b. the classroom and the things in it.

   c. the community: the people and places that can be visited on a field trip. The changes which may be directly observed due to seasons and holidays.

XII. Planning and Evaluating Every Day

1. Writing up daily plans which incorporate curriculum goals and activities which will implement those goals.

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2. Observing the responses of individual children to activities and materials. Evaluating each activity and keeping notes on individual children.

3. Working with the curriculum assistant to develop weekly goals and plans. Involving the total teaching team in planning.

4. Thinking up activities which will implement goals. Using activities suggested by others or found in handbooks as touch-points for creating new ones which will better fit curriculum guidelines and the particular children involved.

XIII. Making Home Visits

1. Explaining the purpose of home visits to parents and establishing a cordial relationship with the parents.

2. Involving the mother or father and the child in an activity using materials available at home.

3. Using activities to illustrate goals and methods of the cognitive curriculum.

4. Suggesting ways that parents can initiate learning activities in the home, supporting the goals of the classroom curriculum.

XIV. Working with Volunteers

1. Carefully explaining curriculum goals and activities for the day to volunteers.

2. Making sure volunteers are familiar with the basic routines and procedures of the classroom.

3. Providing experiences for volunteers which include interacting with children individually or in small groups: not just performing janitorial tasks!

4. Communicating to volunteers how much they are appreciated, how well they are doing, and providing helpful suggestions to them.